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workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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INDEPENDENCE FOR UKRAINE!



**50,000
march in
Moscow
against
Putin's war
threat** see page 5

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.



The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

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"Nordic model" planned for UK

By Rosalind Robson

An all-party parliamentary group on prostitution has recommended Britain follows the lead of countries such as Sweden and Norway, which make the purchase of sex illegal.

Neither buying nor selling sex is illegal in the UK but soliciting, pimping, brothel-keeping and kerb-crawling are all criminal activities.

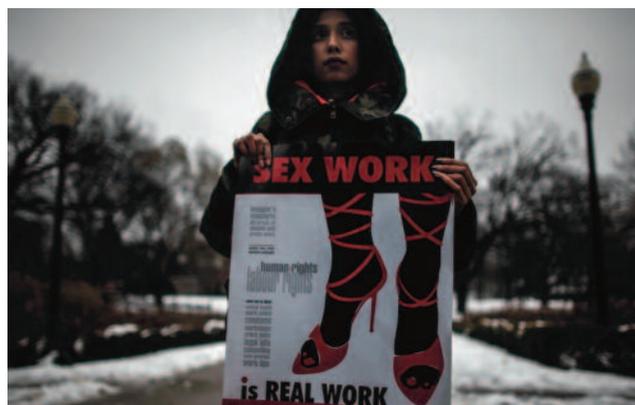
The Nordic model, which also decriminalises sex work, rests on the argument that all prostitution is violence against women. The parliamentary group, following that line, says the current law "serves to normalise the purchase and stigmatise the sale of sexual services — and undermines efforts to minimise entry into and promote exit from prostitution."

Organisations representing sex workers have long argued against this "Nordic model", but these arguments have gone unheeded by the year-long enquiry.

They say the criminalisation of clients will push sex work underground; sex work will continue irrespective of legal change. Such laws further stigmatise sex workers and put lives at risk. Police resources will not be focused on investigating issues of abuse, violence and trafficking but on policing consenting sex.

The report is in line with recent decisions made by the European parliament. The Danish and French governments also plan similar laws.

Sex workers' organisa-



Canada, where they are also fighting the introduction of the "Nordic model"

tions have been campaigning for the introduction of laws similar to those in New Zealand; there sex work is decriminalised and sex workers are allowed to work together in small owner-operated brothels.

FAILS

According to May-Len Skilbrei and Charlotta Holmström of Malmö University there are a number of other ways in which the "Nordic model" fails.

"Contrary to many common feminist appraisals, these laws do not in fact send a clear message as to what and who is the problem with prostitution; on the contrary, they are often implemented in ways that produce negative outcomes for people in prostitution..."

"[These laws] are sometimes applied in conjunction with other laws, by-laws and practices aimed at pinning the blame for prostitution on people who sell sex, particularly if they are migrants..."

"The claim that the number of people involved in

prostitution has declined... is largely based on the work of organisations that report on specific groups they work with, not the state of prostitution more generally: social workers, for example... There is no reason to believe that other forms of prostitution, hidden from view, are not still going on." [Men involved in prostitution, women in indoor venues, and those selling sex outside the larger cities for example].

"[Swedish authorities] ignore the fact that since 1999 or so, mobile phones and the internet have largely taken over the role face-to-face contact in street prostitution used to have — meaning a decline in contacts with women selling sex in the traditional way on the streets of Sweden cannot tell the whole story about the size and form of the country's prostitution markets."

"...the Swedish Sex Purchase Act is often said to be an effective tool against

human trafficking. The evidence for this claim is weak... The official data that does exist is vague; some authors have also pointed out that the act may have raised prices for sex, making trafficking for sexual purposes potentially more lucrative than ever.

"... Even though surveys among the general public indicate great support for the law, the same material also shows a rather strong support for a criminalisation of sex sellers. This contradicts the idea that the law promotes an ideal of gender equality: instead, the criminalisation of sex buyers seems to influence people to consider the possibility of criminalising sex sellers as well..."

"In Norway... even though it is completely legal to sell sex, women involved in prostitution are victims of increased police, neighbour and border controls which stigmatise them and make them more vulnerable. The increased control the Norwegian police exert on prostitution markets so as to identify clients includes document checks on women involved in prostitution so as to find irregulars among them."

"Raids performed in the name of rescue often end with vulnerable women who lack residence permits being deported from Norway."

• Quote from: blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2014/01/03/the-nordic-model-of-prostitution-law-is-a-myth/

Budget = cuts

On 19 March, George Osborne will deliver another cuts budget. He has made clear that the Tories will continue slashing public spending, despite forecasts of economic recovery.

The situation is looking extremely bleak for public services even without new announcements.

Of the cuts in spending already proposed by the government, the Institute for Fiscal Studies reckons 65% of them are still to come. This at a time when key services like the NHS are creaking beneath the pressure of under-funding.

Further cuts will have a disastrous impact on public services and the millions of working-class people who rely on them.

Keen to curry favour with voters ahead of next year's general election, Osborne is likely announce a number of initiatives which, superficially, appear to help the worse-off. Tax cuts, for example, will be central to his programme.

However, the meagre benefits these will have for most tax-payers (as opposed to the very rich) will be heavily outweighed by cuts in other areas.

Five richest families own as much as poorest 20%

By Tom Harris

A recent Oxfam report reveals that just five of the UK's richest families own as much wealth as the poorest 20% of the population — some 12.6 million people.

In the last twenty years, the incomes of the top 0.1% have grown by around £24,000 a year. Over the same period of time, the bottom 90% have seen a real terms increase of only £147 a year — a tiny increase of £2.82 a week!

This stagnation has taken place during a decade in which the cost of living has soared. "Since 2003 the majority of the British public (95%) have seen a 12% real terms drop in their disposable income after housing costs," says the report. In contrast, the richest 5% have seen their disposable income markedly increase.

The division is not just between those at the very top and the very bottom.

The vast majority of us have seen our living standards come under serious under attack while a tiny minority runs wild.

Syria: talks stall, refugee count rises

By Simon Nelson

UN figures confirm there are now 2.5 million Syrian refugees, spread across Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, and Lebanon.

A further 6.5 million Syrians have been displaced within Syria. A further estimated 140,000 people have been killed since the conflict began.

Despite Russia's involvement in Ukraine, their support for Assad remains firm, as does Iran's, and deadlock continues in "Geneva II" talks.

Support from the Gulf states for the majority Sunni Syrian rebels has in turn increased, with Saudi Arabia openly increasing its aid to the rebels.

Whilst arms and logistical support continue, access to humanitarian aid and insistence has become a growing battleground. The UN has continued to negotiate access via Turkey to North Eastern Syria, and into the Kurdish controlled city of Qamishli. 9.3 million people, almost half the population remaining in Syria, now require humanitarian assistance.

Saudi Arabia has sent

trucks carrying aid through Jordan into Southern Syria, as it attempts to boost the capabilities of the rebels, and push for a longer and bloodier conflict, which involves rebels and mercenaries from across the region.

In collaboration with the Lebanese Shia militia Hezbollah, the Syrian government has made gains against the rebels in the town of Yabroud on the Lebanese border. Rebels have lost control of the main supply and access routes into Lebanon, leading to retaliation against the Shia majority by the Sunni militia Jabhat Al Nusra.

Fighting amongst rebel factions has also failed to subside. ISIL/ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) has reacted angrily to demands from Jabhat Al Nusra to begin mediation or risk being expelled from the region.

ISIL are the most brutal and uncompromising of the Sunni militias and their focus on instituting strict Islamic law and order across Syria, rather than on the overthrow of Assad, has brought them into conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated rebel ma-



Syrian Kurdish fighter

jority.

Kurds in Northern Syria, who have gained a greater degree of autonomy since the beginning of the conflict, have come under increasing attack from ISIL, with Kurdish mosques under attack, as well as the burning and looting of villages. The Kurds, who along with the Shia are considered "heretics" by ISIL, are mostly practitioners of Sufi Islam, and have a history of secularism and nationalism.

ISIL and other rebels also accuse the Kurdish Democratic Party (PYD) of continued collaboration with the Syrian government.

Syrian troops reportedly operate in the Kurdish re-

gions, still control the airport, and appear to operate without interference. The PYD has released contradictory statements that both identify itself as being in opposition to the regime but are also ambivalent about who controls the Syrian state, which they maintain they want to remain a part of.

The Arab chauvinism that dominates the official coalition of Syrian rebels has helped to isolate the Kurds from the rebellion.

Whilst the Kurds in Syria enjoy more freedom than people in many of the rebel controlled areas, most of the infrastructure and funding comes from the Syrian state.

CAR: French troops preside over slaughter

By Gerry Bates

In the Central African Republic (CAR) French troops are presiding over purging and slaughter of Muslims by Christian militias.

French troops went into CAR in December last year, when the government collapsed. Then, around a thousand people had died and around a fifth of the population had fled their home.

In March 2013, power had been seized by a rebel militia, the Seleka, which had its roots in the more-Muslim north of the country. The Seleka were well-equipped with Chinese and Iranian-made weaponry and experts guessed they were backed by Chad or Sudan.

The Seleka overthrew unpopular incumbent, François Bozizé, and installed CAR's first Muslim president, Michel Djotodia.



Refugees at Bangui airport

When Djotodia attempted to disarm the Seleka in September 2013, many of the militias refused, and veered out of his control, killing, looting and burning down villages.

Some within the majority Christian population formed a rival militia, the anti-balaka ("balaka" meaning machete in Sango, the local language), and the country further polarised along sectarian lines.

As the Seleka retreated to the north, where the repression of Christians continued, the anti-balaka have

moved from village to village, killing Muslims and razing mosques.

According to the UN, while around 140,000 Muslims normally lived in the capital, Bangui, the population had been reduced to around 10,000 in December and now stands at under 1000.

Amnesty international has called what is happening in CAR "ethnic cleansing", and is warning of a "Muslim exodus of historic proportions". On 10 March the UN announced an investigation into reports of

genocide

Muslims have turned against the interim Christian president, Catherine Samba-Panza, and are hostile to the French troops, who have done little to disarm the rival militias.

Bangui neighbourhoods such as PK5, where Muslim businesses once thrived, now resemble ghost towns. According to the *Guardian*, those attempting to escape another largely Muslim district, PK12, must face down Christian mobs.

Those left behind by the convoys of escapees risk being lynched, and in one incident, five children suffocated in an overcrowded truck and were not discovered to be dead until it arrived at the capital's military airport.

Tens of thousands of people are currently squatting outside the international airport, fearful of returning home.



Security guards shut the gates at Toyota plant

Toyota Bangalore lock-out

Toyota's Indian subsidiary has locked out around 6,400 workers at its two plants near Bangalore, after workers protested against a delay in receiving pay rises following 10 months of negotiations.

In response to the protests and assembly-line stoppages, Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) closed its factories on Sunday 16 March and has not said when they will reopen.

Prasanna Kumar of the Motor Corporation Employees' Union said: "The lockout is illegal as management did not give the mandatory 14-day notice to employees and the state labour office.

"The lockout was declared unilaterally though we have been negotiating with management on wage hike for this fiscal (year) for 10 months."

There have been a number of disputes in the Indian car industry in recent years. In 2012 a riot at Maruti Suzuki's Manesar plant near New Delhi was over wages and working conditions. The company locked out workers for a month, at a cost of \$250 million in lost production. The dispute saw workers chase supervisors with iron rods, killing a personnel manager and injuring close to 100 other managers.

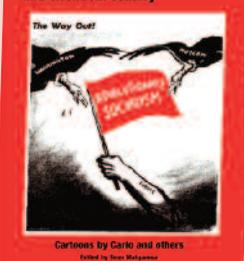
The Toyota lockout comes after the failure arbitration talks earlier this year and a lack of progress in negotiations which started last April.

New book rediscovers US socialist cartoons

A few bold strokes by an artist can convey an idea more vividly and fix it more firmly in the viewer's mind than an editorial or an article would.

The cartoons collected in a new book depict US politics, workers' struggles, America's "Jim Crow" racism, Roosevelt's "New Deal" and Harry Truman's "Fair Deal", and Stalinism in its era of greatest prestige and triumph, as revolutionary socialists saw them at the time.

In an era of wars and revolutions
American socialist cartoons of the mid-twentieth century



You can buy online — price includes postage and packaging. Or send £10.60 to AWL, 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London SE1 3DG

<http://www.workersliberty.org/socialistcartoons>
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“Third camp” or no camp?

Left
By Martin Thomas



Many responses from the left to the Ukraine crisis have ignored, sidestepped, or downplayed the right to self-determination of the Ukrainian people.

Yet Ukraine is one of the longest-oppressed large nations in the world. In an article of 1939 where he raised Ukraine's right to self-determination as an urgent question, Leon Trotsky wrote: “The Ukrainian question, which many governments and many ‘socialists’ and even ‘communists’ have tried to forget or to relegate to the deep strongbox of history, has once again been placed on the order of the day and this time with redoubled force”.

Again today! If the right of nations to self-determination is important anywhere, it is important in Ukraine. If the axiom that peace and harmony between nations is possible only through mutual recognition of rights to self-determination is valid anywhere, it is valid in Ukraine.

Only a few currents on the left side with Putin, and even those a bit shamefacedly: Counterfire and Stop The War, No2EU, the *Morning Star*.

Others propose a “plague on all houses” response. The US *Socialist Worker* (which used to be linked with the SWP-UK, but has been estranged from it, for unclear reasons, since 2001) puts it most crisply: “Neither Washington nor Moscow, neither Kiev nor Simferopol, but international socialism”.

For sure socialists side with Ukrainian leftists in their fight against the right-wing government in Kiev. But as between Ukraine being dominated by Moscow, and Ukraine being ruled by a government based in Kiev and among the people of Ukraine, our response should not be “neither... nor”. We support Ukraine's national rights.

Nations' right to self-determination does not depend on them having congenial governments. The governments under which most of Britain's colonies won independence were authoritarian and corrupt. The socialist who responded



with the slogan “Neither London nor New Delhi”, or “Neither London nor Cairo”, or “Neither London nor Dublin”, would be a traitor.

The even-handed “plague on all houses” response also leads to a skewed picture of reality. Thus, the official statement from the SWP-UK's international network includes no call for Ukrainian self-determination, for Russian troops out, or for cancellation of

Ukraine's debt; but it declares:

“The anti-Russian nationalism that is strongest in western Ukraine has deep roots. Russia has dominated Ukraine since independence in 1991...” And for centuries before that!

“The memory of Russian oppression within the USSR is still vivid and reaches even earlier to the independence struggles of the first half of the 20th [century]”. Stalin's deliberately-sustained mass famine in eastern Ukraine killed millions in 1932-3. There is a deep historical basis to Ukrainian nationalism in eastern Ukraine, and among Russian-speaking Ukrainians, as well as in the West.

“On the other side, many of the millions of Russian speakers identify with Russia”. And many don't. On the evidence of the referendum in 1991, where 92% of the people, and at least 84% even in the most easterly regions, voted to separate from Russia, most do not.

“One of the first acts of the new Ukrainian government after the fall of Yanukovich was to strip Russian of its status as an official language. This encouraged mass protests in the east of the country”. The parliament voted to reverse the 2012 law making Russian an official language. That was undemocratic — and stupid. The new president vetoed the measure, and it was dropped. Even if passed, it would not have applied in Crimea. Russian had not been an official language in Ukraine (outside Crimea) between 1991 and 2012. The protests in the east (often violent, but not, by most reports,

“mass”) were generated by Russian interference, not by the language question.

The “plague on all houses” response is an addled version of the “Third Camp” attitude which AWL has advocated on many issues; but a very addled version.

Usually the SWP argues for “two camps”. Really to oppose US imperialism and its allies, they say, you must to some degree support the US's adversaries, whether it be the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hamas in Israel-Palestine, Saddam Hussein and then the sectarian Islamist “resistance” in Iraq, or Milosevic in Kosova. To do otherwise is to be “pro-imperialist”. Support for an independent “third force” of the working class and the oppressed peoples, against both the US and allies, and their reactionary opponents, is ruled out.

On Ukraine they break from that “two camps” approach, but to an approach which is more “no camp” than “third camp”. (The “no camp” stance has precedents in SWP history, in the wars for independence of Croatia and Bosnia, for example).

Our slogans of Russian troops out and cancelling Ukraine's debt to the West seek to support the Ukrainian people as a “third camp”. We solidarise with the East European leftists who, on the LeftEast website, call for “the *third position* [opposed to both Yanukovich and the new Kiev regime]... namely a class perspective”, and appeals to Ukraine's left “to form a *third pole*, distinct from today's Tweedledums and Tweedledees... You are the only ones who can give meaning to the deaths and wounds of the [occupied square in Kiev]”.

Our position is defined primarily by its positive support for those “third poles” — the people of Ukraine, as against Putin's troops or the IMF and Western government imposing neo-liberal measures; the working-class left in Ukraine, as against the oligarchs and the chauvinists. When we use negative “neither, nor” slogans, we use them as consequences, expressions, or summaries of that positive alignment; and they do not stop us assessing the other “poles” in the political situation in their varied realities.

The “no camp” stance, instead, offers only abstract ultimate aims (international socialism) as an evasion.

Avoiding the issues about male ritual circumcision

Letters



In *Solidarity* 315 I asked: “As socialists, feminists, and labour movement activists, what do we ‘independently’ think about the practice of ritual circumcision amongst male minors, and how does this relate to the Scandinavian debate and the political trends and forces involved?” At no point in his response (*Solidarity* 316) does Eric address this question.

Eric suggests that I soften the blow of my article by reference to Scandinavia; he sarcastically notes, “Scandinavians, after all, are modern, progressive people”. What's he getting at here — as against Jews and Muslims? Eric incorrectly states that “Bassi writes that the correct socialist position would place the left in opposition to [Jewish and Muslim] communities”. And, “[a]lmost as an afterthought, she adds opposition to racism, support for socialism, whatever”.

But it is he not I who homogenises “communities” of people on the basis of their “race”/ ethnicity and religion (stripping people of their differential social, economic, political, and cultural positions, ideas and practices, and individual agency), and it is he not I who panders to the status of so-called “community leaders”.

I don't assume, as he does, that all people who might fall under the category of “Jews” and “Muslims” are opposed to a discussion on the question of informed consent for ritual circumcision.

Moreover, before I arrive at my end set of demands, I both emphasise and reference the ascent of the populist right in Europe, and a rising tide of anti-Muslim racism and anti-Semitism, including in Scandinavia, as critical context. The Scandinavian debate of 2013 and 2014 on the ritual circumcision of male minors is... a given material reality to engage with.

As I was aware, Eric points out that a previous debate on

banning ritual circumcision for male minors occurred in Germany. However, he fails to provide and assess the details. In May 2012 a ruling from the Cologne district court — on an incident of ritual circumcision in which the child was subsequently hospitalised — deemed the circumcision “grievous bodily harm”. From this, as Reuters reports:

“Some doctors and children's rights associations submitted a petition in September [2012] calling for a two-year moratorium and a round-table of medical, religious and legal experts to study circumcision fully.

“In the clear opinion of experts, the amputation of the foreskin is a grave interference in the bodily integrity of a child,” Georg Ehrmann, chairman of the child protection group Deutsche Kinderhilfe [states].”

But the outcome? In December 2012, Germany went on to approve a national law to legitimate parents' right to ritually circumcise their male children. What Eric chooses to accentuate about the German case are the Jewish and Muslim leaders across the European continent who condemned the ban.

When Eric challenges my position that non-therapeutic, ritual circumcision should only be carried out when the person to be circumcised is mature, informed, and able to consent to the procedure, on the basis of a child's right to bodily integrity and to later sexual autonomy, he retorts:

“Using the same reasoning, why not also support the ban on kosher and halal slaughter? ... And while we're busy banning these things, why not close down all faith schools, because after all, they're not teaching children what we'd like them to be taught, and they're forcing children to accept their parents' religion? Shouldn't that decision be reserved for adults who are “mature, informed and able to consent”?”

But what is his political reasoning? He surely doesn't mean what he actually says, which is “using the same reasoning”, i.e., on the basis of a child's right to bodily integrity and to later sexual autonomy, why not ban the ritual slaughter of animals and faith schools?

Eric fails to politically engage with some of the key forces involved in the discussion in Scandinavia. What about the

statement — “Let the boys decide on circumcision” — signed by the Ombudsmen for Children from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, and Greenland, and eleven paediatric experts from Norway, Sweden, and Iceland? What of the Nordic Association of Clinical Sexology's “statement on the non-therapeutic circumcision of boys”?

One cannot crassly bundle together the ritual circumcision of male minors (and therein the crucial question of consent), with the ritual slaughter of animals, with faith schools, and (I'll add to Eric's list) with schoolgirls wearing Islamic headscarves. Why not? Because the Marxist tradition I am applying is about arriving at an independent class position based on a theoretical analysis of the specific empirical realities, and the potentialities from and through this, and each of these cases are different.

Eric asserts that moves to ban ritual circumcision amongst male minors is “closely linked to” moves to ban the ritual slaughter of animals — all of which are “rightly seen by Jews and Muslims as racist attacks on their communities”. Is it that simple? I certainly don't deny that there might be some forces involved that are racist motivated, but there also appears to be forces involved that are *not* racist motivated.

Eric concludes that “[s]ocialists have always defined religion as a private matter. Socialists defend the freedom of religion, and of course the right of people to have no religion”. What he misses is this: on the question of the ritual circumcision of male minors there is a distinct intersection of religious freedom for parents with the right of the child to bodily integrity, and to later sexual autonomy.

Eric Lee's befuddlement can be explained by what he does, which is to respond to a debate on ritual circumcision among male minors by not responding to it at all and instead conflating it to a European climate of anti-Muslim racism and anti-Semitism, and thus cancelling out politics.

Camila Bassi, Sheffield

•Slightly abridged. Full reply here: bit.ly/bassi-reply

After Crimea, a third cold war?

The count from Crimea's 16 March referendum was largely known in advance. Unknown still after the result, and dangerous, are its consequences.

The most hopeful sign for socialists was a 50,000 strong demonstration in Moscow on 15 March saying "Putin, get out of Ukraine", and opposing war.

Our solidarity should be with the Ukrainian people, for its self-determination against Russia's drive to dominate; and with Ukraine's left, against the neo-liberal government in Kiev and the cuts it will push through on the IMF's say-so. We should demand that US and EU governments cancel Ukraine's foreign debts, to give the country a chance for recovery.

Crimea is an area historically distinct from the rest of Ukraine. Unlike any other area of Ukraine, it has a majority which identifies as "Russian". Its people have the right to determine a future distinct from the rest of Ukraine's if they wish.

But the 16 March referendum was nothing like a democratic exercise of that democratic right. The lead-in to it, over the previous four weeks, was:

- Russian troops going onto the streets, surrounding the Ukrainian armed forces' military posts, and setting up road-blocks.

- Russian troops installing a new government based on a party which held only three seats in Crimea's 100-seat autonomous parliament.

- A torrent of publicity presenting the choices as between Crimea being annexed by Russia and subordination to a "fascist coup" in Kiev. Suppression of dissident media and of campaigning against Russian annexation.

- A bar on foreign observers, and a staged endorsement of the referendum by invited politicians from the European far-right, such as Hungary's Jobbik.

- A boycott of the referendum by the area's indigenous people, the Crimean Tatars, and by many Ukrainians living in Crimea.

A referendum in 1991 - when only few of the Tatars had yet returned to Crimea after being deported en masse by Stalin in 1944, and allowed to return only from 1989 - showed 56% in Crimea for separating from Russia. The most recent opinion poll in Crimea before the Russian military takeover showed only 41% for Crimea becoming part of Russia.

The Crimean vote is essentially a ploy by Putin, using a Russian population for his own purposes, rather than the product of a popular movement which happens secondarily



Putin's ambitions do not end in Crimea

to be backed by Putin.

Russia may now formally annex Crimea. If Putin does that, he will not be satisfied. Crimea is a poor area which has required subsidies from Ukraine to sustain it. It will require subsidies from Russia too. Putin's real interest is in the agricultural and industrial wealth of Ukraine.

He may use either annexation of Crimea, or the referendum result and an offer not to annex formally just yet, as a lever to intervene in eastern Ukraine, first in the areas which provide essential supplies to Crimea. He may step up the pro-Russian demonstrations in Ukraine, small so far, but widely reported to be boosted by people bussed in across the border from Russia.

("Those taking part", the *Financial Times* reported on 17 March, "are largely older people, many nostalgic for the days of the Soviet Union, bolstered by a strong contingent of burly young men in black jackets and knitted caps".)

He may seize, or try to seize, eastern areas of Ukraine proper as he has seized Crimea. He may provoke conflict with Ukraine's armed forces, so as to give himself a cover for invading deeper into Ukraine.

For decades or centuries, Russia dominated large parts of central Europe and central Asia, not just in the sense of being a big economic centre with clout through the market, but politically and administratively.

That was the Russia which Karl Marx and Frederick Engels repeatedly denounced as the main international force of counter-revolution.

Russia was changed by the strike movements of its new in-

dustrial working class, climaxing in 1905, which meant that its government could no longer seek empire without worry about resistance at home; and then decisively by the workers' revolution of 1917.

But the Stalinist counter-revolution, generated by the isolation of the new workers' government in poverty-plagued territory, restored many of the patterns of the old Tsarist imperialism.

In 1989-91 the neo-Stalinist empire collapsed in face of a revolt of the peoples, in the subject nations and in Russia itself. Nations such as the Poles, the Hungarians, the Czechs and the Slovaks decisively escaped Moscow's domination, and not even Putin aspires to recapture them.

But, as Russian industry and finance have rebuilt in their new crony-capitalist mode, Putin has sought to regain at least part of Russia's old backyard. Unlike the US and EU, he does not have the economic clout which would make domination through market forces sure, cheap, and robust: he wants politico-military domination.

So far the limits of Putin's ambitions, and the extensive links in the new era between Russian oligarchs and Western markets, have enabled adjustment and accommodation.

Ukraine raises the stakes. The economic sanctions being gradually stepped up by the US and EU, and the possible further military incursions by Putin, are pushing towards a second cold war (or, if the early 1980s are counted as the second, a third), and with hot spots.

Putin's objective is a deal which gives him a dominant influence in the whole of Ukraine. He may be able to get that, or he may be driven back by the resistance of the Ukrainian people and the majority in Russia who do not want war (73% according to a recent poll). But the outcomes may well be less "smooth" than either of those. We are moving towards an era of tension more like the time of the Berlin airlift of 1948-9 than that of the concerted global capitalist unity-with-haggling of the last two decades.

Socialists should endorse neither those in the US and EU capitalist classes who — because profitable relations with Russia are most important to them — want a deal whatever the consequences for Ukraine; nor those who may come to push for war. Our demand on the US and EU ruling classes is that they cancel Ukraine's crippling foreign debt, and give the Ukrainian people a chance to recover.

If it comes to a war between Russia and Ukraine, we are on the side of Ukraine — including of the Ukrainian armed forces, if they fight against Russian domination.

Defend free debate on campuses!

The campaign now spreading in some parts of the student movement for the SWP to be banned from campuses should be opposed. We should defend freedom of political expression and debate on campuses.

The form of "banning" varies: tipping over and physically destroying SWP stalls; insisting that SWP members either absent themselves from campaigns or agree to not have SWP materials on them; or banning the SWP from booking or using rooms in students' unions.

In whatever form it takes, the campaign to "ban" the SWP is not the way to challenge the SWP's behaviour or combat their ideas; it is not the way to make campuses safer places for women, other oppressed groups or victims of abuse; and all these forms of banning have anti-democratic implications that will serve no-one fighting for liberation.

The argument in favour of banning the SWP runs: because SWP leaders grossly mishandled the case of an SWP organiser charged with sexual harassment and rape, the SWP makes women feel unsafe. It is extrapolated to claims that SWP members as such pose direct and immediate physical threats to safety of women; the SWP must therefore be driven off university campuses; this is not a matter for political debate, but of physical safety.

If that logic were valid, then why just the SWP? The Catholic Church, with its terrible record of abuse, has evangelising organisations on most university campuses. The presence of the Catholic Church on campuses is a much greater threat, and a daily source of much more anxiety and intimidation, than the SWP.

Yet no activist group has passed safer-spaces policies re-

quiring the removal of practising Catholics or of Catholic insignia from protests or meetings. Catholic and other religious student groups are not banned from booking spaces in student unions.

And rightly so. Such bans would make campuses significantly *less safe*. A young Catholic in the grip of her faith would not be persuaded by such a campaign — if anything, her faith in the Church would be reinforced — or helped to get support. The campaign against the SWP can only produce a similar silence, where objectionable ideas are reinforced within their ghetto, rather than undermined.

What if a young woman member of the SWP, perhaps a recent recruit not fully aware of the "Comrade Delta" cover-up, maybe even herself a survivor of abuse, is made to feel unsafe by having her stall kicked over and her papers burnt, and being told to get off campus? Who is to be the arbiter of which women's feelings of unsafety justify the making-unsafe of other women?

Those who would ban the SWP should be wary of claiming to be representative of all women, or of all survivors. There are women, and survivors of sexual violence, on all sides of this argument. Claims to reflect "authentic" experience lead to claims that anyone saying different either is not really a woman or a feminist, or is someone whose experience is not valid or has been brainwashed. That approach is a sure way to squash open discussion about sexual abuse, as it was squashed until recent years, adding harm to victims.

De facto, and rightly, socialists, democrats and feminists respond to the presence of the Catholic Church by providing support for those who feel threatened by the Church, dis-

cussing and openly protesting against the Church's crimes and confronting its ideas, and not making counter-productive attempts to confine Catholics to a ghetto.

We respond in the same way to Liberal Democrat, Conservative, and Labour Parties, all of which are responsible for more cover-ups and abuses than the SWP.

Administrative bans and physical destruction of materials cannot combat the ideas of the SWP. They cannot discredit the SWP where it should be discredited; or educate the young, revolutionary, left-wing members of the SWP.

All they can do is create an atmosphere on campuses where bans become accepted tools in the hands of whichever grouping controls the student union at a given moment.

In the 1980s there was a widespread campaign to ban university Jewish Societies because they refused to denounce Israel. The campaign of bans did nothing to help the Palestinians, nor to break J-Soc members who backed Israeli policy from those views. It was entirely counterproductive and wrong.

Ironically, the methods of banning and anathema and denouncing anyone who dissents proposed for "dealing with" the SWP are methods like those used in the past by the SWP itself. They are methods which, despite the good intentions of some of those now using them, can only result in creating a milieu in the image of the SWP in its most sectarian, demagogic and intolerant phase.

Defend freedom of political expression and debate on campus!

The politics of Tony Benn

By Sean Matgamna*

The first thing that should be said and remembered about Tony Benn, who died on Friday 14 March, is that for over four decades he backed, defended, and championed workers in conflict with their bosses or with the “boss of bosses”, the government.

That put him decidedly in our camp. The political ideas which he too often linked with those bedrock working-class battles detract from the great merit of Tony Benn, but do not cancel it out or render it irrelevant.

Politically, Benn's story was a strange one. An editorial in the *Times* neatly summed up the shape of Benn's long career. His was “A Life Lived Backwards”. For the first half of his long life he belonged to the establishment, socially and in his politics. To the dissenting old radical-Liberal and right-wing Labour part of the establishment, but the establishment nevertheless.

Both his parents had MPs for fathers. Four generations of Benns have been MPs. Benn's son, Hilary, has been the third generation of cabinet-minister Benns. His father was Ramsey MacDonald's Secretary of State for India in the 1929 government.

Benn went to one of the leading “public” schools and then to Oxford University, where he climbed up onto that milestone in the careers of so many establishment politicians, the presidency of the Oxford Union debating society. He became a pilot in the hierarchical Royal Air Force, in which pilots

* The author worked with Benn and others to set up the Rank and File Mobilising Committee, which for a while united most of the Labour Party left, at the start of the 1980s.

came from the upper classes, and in 1950, at 25, a Labour MP in a safe seat. His wife, Caroline, was rich, as was Benn himself. This sincere champion of the working class was a millionaire.

Benn became a minister in Harold Wilson's Labour government in 1964-70, and was a minister again in the Wilson-Callaghan government of 1974-9.

Out of office after 1970, he turned left, at the age of 45. Publicly, he shifted during the great occupation and work-in at giant the Upper Clyde Shipyards, in 1971. The decision by Edward Heath's Tory government to end subsidies to ailing industries meant shut down for UCS.

In office Benn had subsidised UCS, so there was logic and continuity in this. He marched alongside the Stalinist UCS leaders, Jimmy Airlie and Jimmy Reid, at giant working-class demonstrations in Glasgow.

Interviewed in the *Observer* at that time, he said of himself that in office one was a pragmatist, and in opposition one's idealism held sway. That might have been a summing up of the Parliamentary Labour Party side of what socialist critics called the old “fake left” culture of the labour movement: left talk combined with right-wing and conventional bourgeois actions at all the crucial turning points. (These days, there is something more like a “fake right” culture!)

Benn's “pragmatism” had kept him in the government that brought in the first statutory wage controls (1966) and tried in 1969 to bring in laws to shackle the unions — an attempt to pioneer what the Heath Tories would ineffectively make law in 1971, and which Thatcher would succeed in shackling on to the labour movement in the early 1980s. He had supported the Wilson government's unsuccessful attempt to join the Common Market (now called the European Union).

After UCS the second Tony Benn started to emerge. He op-

posed the Heath version of the union-restricting laws he had supported in their pioneering Wilson government form in 1969. He sided routinely with striking workers. He came out against the Common Market (EU), opposition to which had by then become an article of faith with the conventional left (Communist Party, Tribune, some trade union officials, and most of the revolutionary left). He came out against nuclear weapons. He championed nationalisation of industries in difficulty.

None of that went far enough to stop him serving as a minister all through the 1974-9 Wilson-Callaghan government, which demobilised the militant working class which had brought it to power. It would be only after Labour's general election defeat of 1979 that Benn shifted fully and decisively.

But after UCS he often spoke for the conventional left at meetings and conferences. He came to reflect the conventional left in his attitude to the Stalinist states.

The modification in his preferred name summed up the shift. “The Right Honourable Anthony Wedgwood Benn” said he now wanted to be known as plain “Tony Benn”, and he was.

ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT

In 1960 he had refused to inherit his father's title, Lord Stansgate, because that would have made him ineligible for the House of Commons. He fought and won two by-elections in his seat, Bristol South East, in a campaign to be allowed to renounce his title and sit in the Commons.

That episode had produced the first “left” and “anti-establishment” Benn. In its politics, it was a piece of old 19th century radicalism revisited. It even had precedents. The atheist Charles Bradlaugh had stood in a series of by-elections in Northampton to win the right to take his seat without first swearing a Christian oath; and in the late 18th century, John Wilkes had fought a similar series of by-elections in the Middlesex seat.

Benn moved left, seeing himself more and more as the modern embodiment of the old radicalism. He took to making frequent historical references in his speeches, and com-

NEW UNIONISM 2014 An activist conference 29 March 11am-5pm University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY

This conference will seek to learn from experiences of organising the unorganised in history and today. It will hear from working-class activists on the frontline of today's class battles, and of struggles to reshape trade unions.

Sessions will include

Is the “organising agenda” a model? A look at the US SEIU, with American labour movement activist Kim Moody

Micro-unions, pop-up unions, and more: what role for “independent unions” in transforming the labour movement?

The story of the 3 Cosas campaign, with activists from the IWGB at University of London

Many “New Unionisms”: 200 years of labour movement history in Britain

How bosses use “performance management” to wage class war

Organising against zero hours contracts

“Back to the Workplace”: How to transform your union branch, a workshop led by Lambeth Activists

Women rail workers fighting sexism in the workplace, in society, and in our unions, with women activists from the RMT

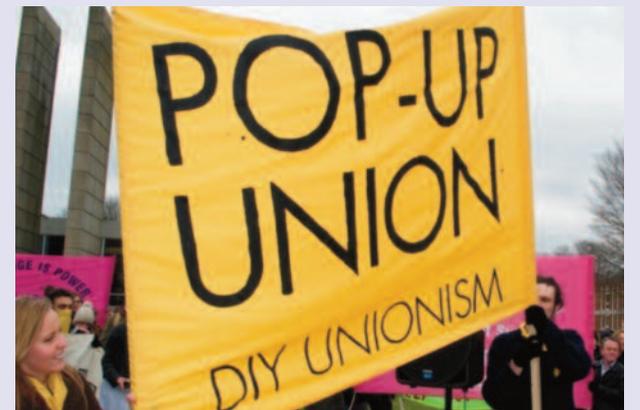


Independent working-class education past, present, and future, with Colin Waugh, author of *Plebs: The Lost Legacy of Working-Class Education*

How New Zealand fast food workers took on McDonald's, and won with speakers including Mike Treen, National Director of Unite New Zealand (via Skype)

Mary Macarthur and the 1911 chainmakers' strike, with Jill Mountford

Speakers from UID-DER, Turkish workers rank-and-file network (via Skype)



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Benn on the march for Upper Clyde Shipyards in 1971. A turning point in his political career

memorated calendar-occasions — the Levellers of the 1640s, the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, the suffragettes, the Chartists (whose call for annual parliaments he, however, rejected).

Ostentatiously, he played his chosen part, visibly relishing it. To say that is not necessarily to question his sincerity, and sincerity does not rule out calculated self-positioning. His enemies said of him that in 1979 Benn calculated that Labour would lose the election, and started to position himself as the instrument of a break with the Labour government's record, in the expectation that he would become party leader.

In any case, he played the role he assumed in 1979 for the remainder of his life.

In 1918 the Bolshevik Anatoly Lunacharsky wrote about Trotsky that he "treasures his historical role and would probably be ready to make any personal sacrifice, not excluding the greatest sacrifice of all — that of his life — in order to go down in human memory surrounded by the aureole of a genuine revolutionary leader".

Benn also treasured his role, but the differences between Trotsky and Benn, and their respective traditions, are defining. Trotsky, from the age of 18, was a Marxist, marinated in the doctrines, the politics, the history that made up the Marxist tradition. He could be and was consistent in aims, goals, and in the tradition he sought to personify and continue. Trotsky was both politically and personally an integrated, organic whole. The doctrine he upheld was coherent.

SHIFT

Benn? He shifted radically halfway through his life — back to the radical seam in British political history, but by about 1980 it was a very thin seam. Its old unwon causes — abolishing the House of Lords and the monarchy, for instance — were now of only marginal importance.

Even the right-wing Blair government could essay to abolish the House of Lords.

Benn's posture translated in the real political world of the 1980s into a comprehensive accommodation with the extant conventional left; and, except for points of historical continuity, that left had very little in common with the old democratic radicalism he wanted conjure back into life. (Moreover, that old radicalism itself had bred antagonistic political currents — Joseph Chamberlain, the radical imperialist, as well as Liberal anti-imperialism).

The labour movement left of the early 1980s was a chaos trying to make sense of itself. Shaped by Stalinism in varying dilution, its dominant model of "socialism" was cross-bred

from Britain's wartime state-regulated economy on one side and on the other from the USSR and its East European satellites.

Most of the left believed in the goodwill of Russia's rulers and their peaceful intentions and priorities, even while Russian Stalinism was expanding its areas of control and semi-control, as it did all through the 70s and early 80s. In 1982 Benn's constituency Labour Party, Chesterfield, with Benn's evident agreement, wrote an open letter to the Russian dictator Brezhnev, accepting the good intentions and desire for peace of the government that had invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and triggered the "second cold war".

Playing the demagogue to the existing left and its causes and assumptions, Benn won tremendous popularity among people eager for a prominent and capable tribune who, moreover, knew how to play the media's game.

Benn walked from his position of upper-class privilege into leadership of a wide coalition of leftists like a man casually walking into his own living room. Visibly glorying in the applause and approbation which it brought to him, he became the central leader of a loosely defined left.

And in Benn's role there was much of the old "Dancing Elephant Act". The elephant trainer moves his hands and the elephant dances to the gestures. But in fact the reality is the opposite of what it appears to be. The trainer's skill is to move in time with the elephant.

Benn appeared to "conduct" the left orchestra, but in fact he accommodated to what he found already there. He did that as a calculated role.

For instance, he talked much of the radical Christian tradition and of the affinity of the Christian tradition with the socialist attitudes to which Benn appealed. He presented himself as in that Christian tradition. He was widely accepted as a Christian. In fact he was an atheist!

The late John Mortimer, in a published interview, had to ask Benn, repeatedly, insistently, again and again, if he believed in God. Finally, after dodging the question many times, Benn admitted that he didn't.

A political event, a picture, an image that summarises his political trajectory, stands at each end of Benn's career as a radical.

The first is Benn marching with the leading stewards from UCS through Glasgow. The second is the aged Benn, no longer an MP, on the eve of the invasion of Iraq conducting a fawning interview with Saddam Hussein — producing in effect a "party political television broadcast" from Saddam

to the people of Britain. There was no "speaking truth to power" there! Benn would have seen what he did then as part of the "fight for peace".

Accepting all the problematic causes of a confused and disintegrating left, Benn joined in the pro-Milosevic, pro-Serbia "Stop The War Coalition" in 1999, making an outcry to "stop the war" against Serbia which in the event succeeded in stopping the genocidal Serbian war against the Albanian population of Serbia's colony, Kosova. (It was not necessary to back NATO, or to give the Western powers any political credence or support, to understand what was going on).

Benn and the Catholic ex-Monsignor, Bruce Kent, spoke to a big meeting at the Friends Meeting House on Euston Road, London, at which Benn delivered a blimpish denunciation of Germany, and Kent spoke of the proletarian-background Labour Minister of Defence, George Robertson, like a dowager duchess describing an incompetent milk-delivery man — "that little man".

Yet, in this bitter political chronicle, it is necessary to return to where we began: Benn stood with the workers in all the clashes after 1979.

With a critical edge to his old-style radicalism, he might have fruitfully interacted with the extant left in the ideologically battered condition it was in by the time he joined it. But that would not have been popular with the conventional left. Benn chose to seek popularity, to be the chief demagogue, to ingratiate himself with what existed.

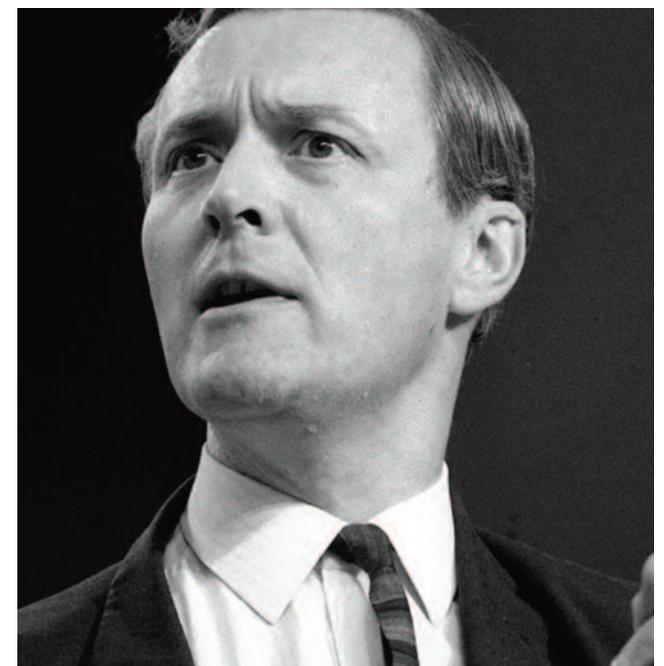
From the (politically speaking) rotten timbers, decaying carcasses, bits of broken stone, and crumbling dusty cinders that he found to hand, nothing worthwhile could be made.

Benn's relationship with the left and labour movement after 1979 — that of speaker, orator, articulator, political chameleon to the coloration of his audience — is most reminiscent of the role which freelancing radical leaders of 200 years ago played with the nascent labour movement and the broader plebeian anti-establishment stirrings they found to hand — manipulation, demagoguery. Such people as, for example, "Orator Hunt", one of the speakers at the meeting in St Peter's Square, Manchester, that became the site of the Peterloo Massacre in 1819.

At that time, the labour movement was only coming into being and taking shape, as the Industrial Revolution transformed Britain. Benn's career was part of the decline and decay of the old left, the old trade unions, and the old working class.

In old age Benn found himself widely popular even with people who disagreed with his political ideas or knew little or nothing about them. He appeared to be a man of principle who stuck to his guns against the establishment.

There was some justice in that, too. And symbolism. Benn did play, personify, and project himself as a rebel and anti-establishment nay-sayer — irrespective of the politics involved — and, for us, despite his politics.



Benn at the time of his bid to become Deputy Leader of the Labour Party in 1981.

Bob Crow 1961 - 2014

By Janine Booth

Bob Crow represented plain-speaking trade union militancy. He was seen as the personification of the idea that the job of a trade union leader is to stick by and stick up for the union's members — not apologise for, close down or slither away from their battles with employers.

Everyone who understands and values that mourns his shocking and premature death. There is a genuine feeling of sorrow, shock, disbelief and profound sadness among RMT members, and condolences have poured in from everyone from union leaders around the world to passengers coming up to transport staff.

On the day of Bob's death, the BBC referred to him as "the best-known trade union leader in the country". The remarkable thing about this is that RMT has around 80,000 members: there are many trade unions significantly — ten, even twenty times — larger than that. Really, the General Secretary of a union which sits in the TUC's "smaller unions" category should not be the best-known trade union leader in Britain. The fact that Bob Crow was reflects the RMT militancy of which he was the high-profile and (forgive the pun) striking public face. (It also reflects negatively on other union leaders.)

Bob Crow joined London Underground as a track worker in 1977, aged 16. He soon became involved in the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), becoming a representative and in 1984, winning the NUR's youth award. Eight years later, he was elected to the national executive of RMT, representing London Transport track workers. In 1994, he became Assistant General Secretary, defeating the incumbent AGS. The election of the young, belligerent Crow — an outspoken critic of the union's leadership — was seen as a boost for the left and for industrial militancy.

Following the death of Jimmy Knapp, Bob was elected General Secretary in February 2002, easily beating his two rivals. He was re-elected unopposed in 2007 and 2012.

Many obituaries of Bob have pointed to the increase in RMT membership during his time as General Secretary, bucking the general trend across the union movement. Workers will join a union that shows that it is willing to fight,



Bob Crow: He stuck by and stuck up for his members, rather than slithering away from battles.

through which they can win job security and better pay and conditions. Fighting industrial unionism beats business unionism as a builder of membership. As well as, and alongside, industrial militancy, unions need a genuine organising drive — another thing that Bob Crow brought to the General Secretary's post.

Last month, Bob spoke at the launch event for my book, *Plundering London Underground*, for which he had written the foreword. He not only spoke passionately about privatisation on the Tube and elsewhere in the transport industry, but also of the importance of books, of working-class self-education and of recording the history and ideas of our movement. Perhaps contradicting the image of him presented by the right-wing press, Bob was an advocate of reading and study. As General Secretary, he introduced book reviews to the union's journal, *RMT News*, and significantly increased the union's education and training programme. His predecessor, Jimmy Knapp, had shut down the union's former education centre at Frant Place in Kent; Bob oversaw the establishment of a new national education centre in Doncaster.

For the media, especially that based in London, "Bob Crow" meant "Tube strikes". It was frustrating when papers like the *Evening Standard* declared that Bob had "ordered" us

out on strike, when we knew that it was rank-and-file London Underground workers who demanded and drove action to defend our jobs, conditions and the public transport system. And — though you would barely believe it from newspaper coverage — once he became the General Secretary, Bob was not even in the meetings which called ballots or strikes on the Tube or on other companies: that was not part of his role.

When the *Daily Mail* followed Bob on his family holidays, or poured hypocritical scorn on (and serially exaggerated) his salary, it was not because it thinks — as we and some other socialists and trade unionists think — that workers' representatives should be on a worker's wage. It was because the Mail hates trade unions, hates workers fighting back, and hates anything progressive or decent.

RMT has reacted angrily to a so-called tribute from London Underground Ltd (LUL) Managing Director Mike Brown in the *Evening Standard*, in which Brown appeared to suggest that Bob would have helped LUL to carry out its job-cutting plans. Apparently, because Bob was a nice guy who does not oppose new technology, that meant that he would support LUL's plans, if only it weren't for the pesky Executive insisting on pointless strikes.

That's Bob Crow for the ruling class and its media — in life, a figure to hate, a "dinosaur" who "wrecked the lives of commuters" because the union he led took strike action (which in truth defended passengers as well as workers); in death, rewritten as either a collaborator or a lovable throwback to a militant past that should, they hope, die with him.

Bob Crow was not perfect, and no union leader should be held up beyond criticism. Our and others' disagreements with Bob are a matter of record — there is no need to go into their detail here. We should note, though, that Bob Crow could take criticism and disagreement from within our movement: he did not hold grudges or demonise critics.

The best tribute to Bob is to prove the ruling class and its media wrong. Of course, to his actual family and his wider trade union family, Bob Crow is as a person irreplaceable. But let's not repeat the idea that he — or Tony Benn, who died just three days later — was "the last of his kind". We will not lose our militancy because we have so tragically lost Bob Crow.

A workers' and passengers' plan

An extract from Janine Booth's book, *Plundering London Underground: New Labour, private capital and public transport 1997-2010*.

London Underground must provide services to meet people's needs, so its operation and development must be planned. The PPP showed, as private ownership had shown more than half a century earlier, that the "market" cannot meet London Underground's needs. ...

Workers and passengers have a common interest in London Underground providing as good a public service as possible. (I include in the scope of "passengers" those who wish to be passengers but are currently excluded — those who would travel by Tube if it were cheaper, more physically accessible, and if it served the areas they travel to and from.) Passengers want a service that is reliable, safe and accessible. Many of London's workers travel to work by Tube, and London Underground workers have the knowledge of how to make the system work to its maximum effectiveness. Both groups are motivated by improving London Underground, neither by accumulating private profit.

To draw up and carry out their plan, the first thing our workers' and passengers' governing body would need is full access to London Underground's financial information. The PPP and other private schemes kept finances shrouded from public scrutiny. Metronet refused to divulge its financial information. The cap on Alstom plc's penalties is "commercially confidential". RMT obtained a copy of the London Underground power PFI contract, only to find that the entire section on finance was redacted — hidden behind blocks of black ink...

To plan London Underground's future direction, we need full public access to, and scrutiny of, its finances and structures. That way, a democratically-run Underground can identify how much funding it needs, and can identify waste which

can be eliminated — money draining away from Tube services into private companies' profits, excessive salaries for top managers, or duplication and bureaucracy caused by sub-dividing London Underground's functioning. As Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky advocated in his *Transitional Programme* in 1938: "The abolition of 'business secrets' is the first step toward actual control of industry ... transport should be placed under an observation glass."

Alongside political and industrial democracy, this openness and scrutiny will allow knowledge of London Underground's operation to spread among workers and passengers, enabling the working class to apply that understanding collectively to the running of the Tube. Already, many Londoners — frustrated by the Underground's shortcomings, or imagining a better transport system serving a better city — find themselves saying, "If we ran the Tube..."

What might workers and passengers plan? Large-scale investment to upgrade the Underground; significant cuts in fares; expansion of the network with new and extended lines; enough staff to run the system effectively; better safety standards; new technology designed to be used by staff rather than to replace them; prompt repairs.

A Workers' and Passengers' Plan could organise those projects currently in the pipeline (such as Crossrail 2; extensions to the Bakerloo, Northern and Central lines) and those that ought to be (making the entire network fully accessible to disabled people). The Plan could prioritise those projects that better serve working-class communities rather than jumping to the dog-whistle of big business' latest luxury location. It could plan effectively for London's expected population growth.

Moreover, London Underground is a good candidate for "public works" designed to both improve services and create jobs: to revive the economy at a time of recession. Under pressure of working-class demands, governments in the 1920s and

1930s did this — why not now? New work could be carried out by a TfL Major Works Department, with secure, directly-employed jobs and apprenticeships for young Londoners.

London Underground needs a Workers' and Passengers' Plan, drawn up and overseen by a democratically-elected governing body of workers, passengers and the community. This would lead to significant improvements in Underground services. It would also see a seismic shift in power towards the class of people who travel, rely and work on the Tube and away from the class that uses it merely as a source of profit. A Workers' and Passengers' Plan would be a popular democratic exercise which would massively extend the debate about London Underground's future, and would turn working-class people into decision-makers not just service users or wage slaves...

If workers and passengers are to run London Underground, then workers and passengers must lead the campaign to achieve this policy. Those who currently control London Underground, and extract profit from it, will not willingly give up the reins. The Underground trade unions need to unite and organise an effective battle, alongside service users and as part of the working-class movement. We can devise this campaign by learning from both the strengths and the flaws of the fight against the PPP. It needs to be active, rank-and-file-led, militant and outward-looking. And it needs to put its faith in our own self-organisation. Genuine allies are welcome, but we learned from bitter experience that we cannot rely on political opportunists or quangos.

It was New Labour's retreat from working-class and socialist policy that brought about the calamitous PPP. A return to these things can begin to save it. We need a more rational way of organising London Underground, as part of a more rational way of organising society.

• bit.ly/plun-lu

Imperialism: the debate in full daylight

By Martin Thomas

Between 1898 and World War One, Marxists keenly debated imperialism. For decades almost the only living legacy of that debate was in various interpretations of Lenin's pamphlet of 1916, "Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism".

Whatever the large merits of Lenin's text, to read it in abstraction from the debates of the time and of the previous two decades, which Lenin knew and assumed many readers would know, must impair understanding. Moreover, Lenin's text was mostly read "through" Stalinist renderings, and the Trotskyists of the day had urgent calls on their slight resources which came before the task of unpicking those renderings in detail.

Over recent decades more and more of the areas of shade around the old debate have been illuminated. I tried to contribute to that in an article in 1996 (bit.ly/imp-96). In 2011 Richard Day and Daniel Gaido published their 950-page selection from the debate: "Discovering Imperialism: Social Democracy to World War One".

Their excellent work extends the illumination greatly, and is now sufficiently current that second-hand copies are within the purchasing power of left activists.

Quibbles could be made about the selection. For example, Day and Gaido seem to have looked in the archives for articles labelling themselves as about "imperialism", although in the earlier years of the debate the German Marxists discussed what they would later call "imperialism" under the label "Weltpolitik" (world policy). (The word "imperialism" was taken to be jargon of British bourgeois politics rather than a general term). Thus the first 300 or so pages of the book are heavily weighted towards articles, sometimes relatively journalistic, on British imperial developments, and omit important writings of around or before 1900 which discussed "Weltpolitik" more generally. Nevertheless, the selection is immensely valuable.

It should be read by every Marxist who wants to use the word "imperialism" in her or his explanations and arguments, and to reckon that she or he knows what they are talking about.

SPD

The high point of Day's and Gaido's book is their presentation of the debate sparked by the Morocco crisis of 1911 and going through the German Social Democratic Party congress in Chemnitz in 1912.

Hugo Haase moved the majority motion. "Everywhere the striving to acquire new spheres of power and influence in other countries, especially the annexation of overseas countries to one's own state, has become dominant. This imperialist idea has currently seized the whole world... It springs from the economic development of the great capitalist states...

"Powerful upswing in world traffic... An export of means of production, an export of capital, is also taking place at an ever-growing pace...

"Countries previously totally excluded from industry... have been dragged into large-scale capitalist business...

"Colonial policy... displays the features eminently characteristic of imperialism - especially violence... Under the rule of imperialism, violence is an 'economic power' of the first rank...

"The idea of a Greater Germany [appears as] merely the product of an absolutist disposition... But [as] Luxemburg [and others have] pointed out... the question under discussion [is] much greater - namely, the onset of a new phase of capitalist development...

"As a consequence... the arms race developed on an ever-larger scale... The competition in the arms field must ultimately lead either to a world war or to a financial collapse... German Social Democracy has always voted on principle against the arms race...

"Imperialism drives the capitalist system to its highest stage; it is ready to make room for another system, the socialist one..." (p.627-44).

A series of analytic issues flickered on the edge of this summary, but Haase was not wrong to present it as commanding a wide consensus inside the Marxist movement.

The debate shows us why Marxists like Lenin were so shocked when the German and other Social Democratic par-



Marxists intensely debated how to respond to imperialist carve-ups and wars.

ties supported their own governments in World War One. It also shows us the merits of a culture of Marxist discussion in which, even in sharp polemics, socialists took each others' ideas seriously. Haase quoted Luxemburg approvingly; Karl Radek, in a fierce blast from the left in the run-up to the congress, started by summarising the theoretical debate with acknowledgements not just to Parvus but also to Kautsky, Hilferding, and Bauer.

Another theme which would figure largely in Lenin's 1916 polemic, which restated previously-established ideas of Marxist analysis against those who had discarded them in order to adapt to wartime bourgeois politics, was also well-established by 1912: the connection between imperialism and the rise of large capitalist corporations dominating whole markets. "The watchword of capital is no longer free competition but monopolies, including the monopolisation of foreign markets through the creation of colonies" (Radek, p.548).

In the early years of the debate, some socialists had thought that imperialism was a policy only of a faction of the bourgeoisie, and an unrealistic one. In part the argument was skewed by the term "imperialism" being a coinage not of Marxists but of British bourgeois politicians, and those self-styled "imperialist" politicians defining "imperialism" by a project which was indeed particular and unrealistic: the conversion of the British empire into an Imperial Federation with uniform tariffs against the rest of the world.

But at Chemnitz no-one contradicted the view which Anton Pannekoek put crisply: "imperialism [is] a necessary... development of capitalism, not in the sense that some other form could not be conceivable or construed, but in the sense that this path was the one actually pursued. We can demonstrate that imperialism damages the interests of broad strata even among the bourgeoisie. But the fact remains that the whole bourgeoisie supports this policy... We want to struggle as brusquely as possible against this brutal, dangerous form of capitalism, but not by trying to drive capitalism back to an earlier form... There is only one way: beyond imperialism to socialism".

'WORLD POLICE'

Indeed, elements of the analysis were shared with a much broader range of leftish opinion. Day and Gaido include (p.314ff) a review in 1906 by Otto Bauer of a book on British imperialism by the liberal Gerhart von Schulze-Gaevernitz. Schulze-Gaevernitz deplored imperialism as the policy of the "rentier state".

Bauer, a very mainstream figure in Social Democracy, took that assessment by Schulze-Gaevernitz as no more than admitting the obvious, and used his review to flay Schulze-Gaevernitz on other grounds: that he failed to see that "the

navy and the colonial governments are a world police force that enables capital to invest safely all over the world"; that some industrialists, as well as financiers, were heavily committed to imperialism; and that British workers opposed imperialism.

Eduard Bernstein, who had helped spark the debate on imperialism back at the end of the 1890s when he horrified his comrades by claiming that "savages" had "only a conditional right to the land occupied by them", spoke at Chemnitz as an outrider on the right of the SPD. He backed Haase's motion, wishing only that it had also included a call for international courts of arbitration to settle disputes between the big powers. (Haase retorted that US president Taft had come out in favour of international courts of arbitration to settle all questions, then quickly rejected arbitration when a dispute which he considered important arose, with Britain over the Panama Canal). In Bernstein's mind British imperialism was not so bad, but, yes, Germany's imperialism and arms race must be opposed.

The outspoken Social Democratic right-winger Ludwig Quessel, who said that socialists should "stand behind the German government when it champions equality of rights for our industry", got no applause at Chemnitz.

With hindsight the debate helps us learn lessons from why the socialist parties of that era collapsed so shockingly in 1914. The whole movement, with flickering and ambiguities on the edges, had accepted an analysis which should flatly have ruled out those parties' support for their countries' governments in 1914.

In the drive to draw active conclusions from that analysis the pre-1914 socialist left made criticisms and clarifications which the socialist mainstream deflected and hivered over. It established ideas which got lost in mid-20th century socialist regressions and are only now being re-learned. And the 1912 left itself, as we shall see, was not yet sufficiently sharp and confident about active conclusions.

A debate between the left and the mainstream for which Haase spoke had raged since the "Morocco crisis" of July-August 1911. A rebellion challenged the Sultan, who ruled under informal French and Spanish overlordship. France and Spain sent troops. Germany sent a battleship, ostensibly to protect German "trade interests". Britain sided with France against the perceived German challenge. Eventually Germany agreed to a formal French "protectorate" in Morocco in return for France ceding territory in West Africa to Germany.

COLONIES

The Berlin Social Democratic (SPD) paper published a wheedling article by Bernstein which complained of all the governments acting immorally by disregarding the deal which had ended the previous "Morocco crisis" in 1906; and the SPD put out a mass broadsheet written by Kautsky which denounced the German action on the feeble grounds that it would not benefit even most of the bourgeoisie and concluded by appealing to middle-class opponents of imperialism to back the SPD.

Rosa Luxemburg angrily declared that the broadsheet "places itself in the comical situation of pretending to know the interests of the bourgeois classes better than those classes do themselves" and "says not a single word about the native peoples of the colonies".

Other polemics followed from Rudolf Hilferding, Karl Radek, and Paul Lensch, editor of the main newspaper of the SPD left, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. Gustav Eckstein wrote a defence of Kautsky. The SPD leadership balanced things by publishing an official SPD pamphlet on imperialism by the left-winger Julian Marchlewski (in hundreds of thousands of copies).

By the Chemnitz congress in September 1912 the debate focused on whether the SPD should campaign for international agreements to limit armaments.

Paul Lensch spoke for the left in Chemnitz, since Luxemburg was absent through ill-health.

Like other speakers and writers from the left, he did not oppose arms-limitation agreements, or even rule out parliamentary initiatives by the SPD to "expose" the government for not exploring such agreements.

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"By no means do I consider a temporary agreement between two capitalist states on questions of armament policy to be excluded... [but] here it is a question of an international agreement for general arms reduction. And I... certainly consider that to be utopian..."

"Our task cannot be to correct world history's homework and say: 'Dear world history, here is your work back! It's swarming with mistakes...' We must deal with capitalism as it is..."

"The counter-tendencies against imperialism are nothing other than counter-tendencies against capitalism as a whole - namely socialism! Social Democracy!..."

"We have no special weapons against [the arms race], only the great and simple slogans: agitate and organise!"

As far as I can judge, the SPD mainstream commanded a majority at Chemnitz. Its motion agreed that: "imperialism... is a product of the capitalist economic system [and] can be completely overcome along with it". But "nothing must be left undone to lessen its dangerous effects".

"Marx and Engels", declared Haase, "always rightly warned us against embracing a fatalist conception of history... We cannot prevent every war, but we could in particular cases check the destruction".

Karl Liebknecht, soon to be the tribune of internationalist opposition to the SPD's capitulation in World War One, backed Haase, saying that Lensch and the left were "mechanistic". According to Trotsky, at the time Lenin, observing from afar, agreed with Liebknecht rather than Lensch and Luxemburg.

The left had made important points in the 1911-2 debate, ideas of general importance which largely got lost in subsequent decades and have been rediscovered only painfully and piecemeal by Marxists in recent times.

Radek said that the fact that a demand was "momentarily very effective for agitation" - as he implicitly conceded the SPD's arms-limitation demand was - could not be decisive. "Social Democrats must never adapt their agitation to the illusions of the masses... they must on the contrary, try to free them of all illusions by telling them in every action what is the case".

He further explained that socialists could consider partial arms-limitation agreements possible, and welcome them, without making such agreements their own demand.

In the first place, those agreements would be "just means to put aside the smaller antagonisms in order to gather forces for the big battles". More fundamentally, "were the proletariat of two countries to... work together for a 'reconciliation' of their imperialist governments, that could not happen without the agreement being based on a common standpoint of the imperialist governments..." The "reconciliation" would be a "yellow reform", a reform which "leads away from the class struggle".

Lensch argued that the imperialist arms race obliged socialists to give up "old, comfortable, and easy" habits. They could no longer "praise the policy of foreign states in order to criticise more forcefully one's own government".

They could not endorse it when capitalist states made ostensibly "purely defensive" agreements "on whose design we had no influence, whose content we never know exactly and fully".

They could no longer say that they opposed "aggressive" wars but might accept "defensive" wars. "Actually, capitalist Europe is organised into two state-cartels ready to attack each other", and when the time came, "nothing is easier than to provoke an adversary into an 'aggressive' war". The working class must be what a later generation would call the Third Camp, standing against all rival capitalist blocs.

The old idea that Russian Tsarism was so great a reactionary power that defensive war against it by Germany must be accepted had been rendered obsolete by the revolution of 1905.

Mechanically copying what Marx or Engels wrote on foreign policy was now wrong. Those writings, "often published anonymously in bourgeois journals", were chiefly "written to show bourgeois democracy the direction in which it should influence the course of events" so as best to speed the creation of solid bourgeois nation states in place of antique prince-doms and so "create the terrain for the struggle for socialism". "It is questionable whether the proletariat would have actually implemented the foreign policy advocated by Marx if it had been an independent social force", because then the choices and priorities would have been different.

The left also differentiated from the mainstream in its attention to the revolts of the colonial peoples. The SPD main-

stream opposed colonialism, and Kautsky wrote a good pamphlet against it in 1907, but tended to base its anti-imperialism more on the costs of the arms-race, the illusoriness of the benefits promised by the imperialists to the metropolitan working classes, and the dangers of war.

Oddly, the same socialists sometimes neglectful of the revolt of the colonial peoples (as over Morocco in 1911) sometimes saw Japan as an "anti-imperialist" factor. Max Beer wrote in 1902: "China may perhaps still have some hope of becoming independent if it lets itself be guided by Japan". In a footnote on the same page (p.278) Day and Gaido cite Radek as postulating Japan as an anti-imperialist force as late as 1922. Kautsky, in one of his 1914-5 articles speculating about possible more benign paths for capitalist development, wrote of the happy possibility that history would "amalgamate Japan with China as a common people" (p.831). Socialists today minded to consider such powers as Iran as "anti-imperialist" factors should take note.

The idea that imperialism signified a further, more advanced, "highest" stage of capitalist development, rather than an episodic policy, was more or less commonly agreed among Marxists by 1912, enough so to be written into the Chemnitz resolution. It got into the Chemnitz resolution thanks to argument from the left. But Haase, and Liebknecht too, charged the left with being "fatalist" and "mechanistic".

Bernstein, on the right wing of the SPD (but due to be expelled from the SPD in World War One because of his pacifistic rather than revolutionary opposition to Germany's war) put the idea more sharply. A left liberal had said that he "must approve the naval budget because it is a practical imperative". "Some people actually uphold the same view when they say, as the [left] just did, that on the basis of modern society the arms race is an absolute necessity". It was the course of history? Well, "world history has often taken false paths" (p.650-2).

The left, in response, developed an important idea from Marx: that "it is the bad side that produces the movement which makes history, by providing a struggle" (*Poverty of Philosophy*). Capitalist development is progressive because it produces the struggle against capital of its gravediggers, the working class.

Marchlewski: "Imperialism means historical progress insofar as it is the political expression of a more developed form of capitalism, and, in this sense — indeed, only in this sense — it is also to be developed by the working class. In the political field, imperialism gives as sharp an expression to robbery of the people as the trusts do in the economic field" (p.310).

Lensch: "We fight against imperialist development by trying to drive it beyond itself" (p.647).

MASS ACTION

Luxemburg (later, in the Junius pamphlet of 1915, not included in Day's and Gaido's collection): "The capitalist victory parade and all its works bear the stamp of progress in the historical sense only because they create the material preconditions for the abolition of capitalist domination and class society in general. And in this sense imperialism ultimately works for us".

Anton Pannekoek argued that imperialism "places the working class in a new fighting position. Earlier it could hope to progress slowly but surely... Today... its attack has been turned into a defence... Imperialism threatens the masses with new dangers and catastrophes... and whips them up into resistance... But these phenomena... can only partially be fought against in parliament... Mass actions are therefore the natural consequence of the imperialist development of modern capitalism and increasingly constitute the necessary form of struggle against it" (p.895-6).

Pannekoek wrote that in another but linked debate in 1910-2 between the left and the mainstream in the socialist movement, the "mass strike debate", about whether the SPD should push for escalating mass strikes or plod along in a more cautious "strategy of attrition" (*Die Massenstreikdebatte*, ed. Antonia Grunenberg, Frankfurt 1970; bit.ly/mstrike).

The left knew that to agitate for arms-limitation deals was to trifle and feed illusions, but it was groping for how to answer the mainstream's charge of "fatalism" and "mechanistic" thinking. Karl Radek explained that the struggle for socialism could not delay until after SPD agitation had gradually gathered a majority of opinion for the socialist cause. "A major part of the working class can get rid of their indifference, their distrust in their own power, and become socialist, only in the process of the struggle for power by the Social-Democratic workers, and... therefore, the road to power and the struggle for power must not begin only after the overwhelming majority gathers under the banner of Social

Democracy" (p.557).

Yet Lensch concluded his speech in 1912: "We are approaching a time of great mass struggles... If we extend our organisation, our political education, if we prepare ourselves — then all we must do is be ready!" (p.649, emphasis added).

Pannekoek, supporting Lensch, said that imperialist phenomena "drive the masses to revolt and they revolutionise people's minds... they... drive the masses into the streets... Our standpoint against imperialism means a very determined struggle, relentlessly and continually pursued in parliament but also... through actions of the masses themselves" (p.655).

But, as it turned out, this debate took place less than two years before World War One broke out. The "ever and more powerful demonstrations" which Pannekoek called for would not bring socialist revolution within that time.

Both left and mainstream tended to postulate a convulsive collapse of capitalist authority as coming soon, but only mistily. No-one could guarantee that the collapse would happen before the outbreak of war. Even it did happen, the SPD would surely need more aggressive tactics than "ever and more powerful demonstrations" to take power.

If the mainstream saw the left as saying "be more militant, argue for socialism, and wait for the crisis to help us", then there was some justice in the perception. As there was also justice in the left's perception that the mainstream was saying: "Yes, capitalism is heading to war. But who knows, there might be other possibilities. Let's see if we can win some broad support by agitating for arms-limitation deals".

Despite saying again and again that they feared war soon, and despite the fact that debate had been fierce for over a year, the left proposed no alternative to Haase's motion at Chemnitz. Lensch said: "it can only be a question of here of beginning the debate on imperialism, and the coming years will force us to discuss this issue often enough". Pannekoek: "Naturally, this discussion can only be a preliminary debate" (p.645, 653).

Quite likely the left feared that a motion of its own would be heavily defeated, and the defeat would make it harder for them to get a hearing in subsequent debate. But that calculation could have had great weight only if they did not really believe that the crises would come as soon as all that.

And what did the mainstream think? Day's and Gaido's collection includes an citation by Radek from a 1911 polemic in the mass-strike debate by Kautsky (not included in Grunenberg's collection mentioned above). Kautsky had written: "If the people see the cause of a war not in their own government but in the viciousness of their neighbours (and what government is not trying, with the help of its press, its parliament, its diplomats, to impress this idea upon the mass of the population), under such circumstances... they all become first of all patriots, including the internationally minded, and if some individuals had the superhuman courage to rebel against this... the government does not have to lift a finger to render them harmless. The angry crowd would kill them itself" (p.613-4).

The mainstream did not argue, and did not believe, that agitation for arms-limitation deals would stop war. But here they were, in a lead article in the SPD theoretical weekly *Die Neue Zeit*, saying more or less explicitly that if war came, and failed to arrange itself so conveniently that the war was small and unpopular, then they would see no choice but to go along with it.

Both the mainstream and the left said, in effect, that war was probable, and soon. Both had no answer other than to propose things which they admitted would not stop war — agitation for arms-limitation deals, or mass actions — and to hope for the best.

Some socialists were thinking about the awkward, ugly questions of what they would do if war came. At the Stuttgart congress of the international socialist movement in 1907, Lenin and Luxemburg had moved a successful addition to the anti-war resolution:

"In case war should break out anyway, it is their duty to intervene in favour of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule".

In Day's and Gaido's collection, debate about imperialism is really almost always debate about the arms-race and the war danger. Yet the collection shows that in the SPD (all the items collected are from German or Austrian debate, bar two articles from France) the thought in Lenin's and Luxemburg's addition remained on the fringes of consciousness.

Why were the Bolsheviks different? In large part, because they had learned from conditions in Russia always to factor catastrophe, collapse, revolution, crisis into their perspectives, as well as more or less steady evolution.

Unions must fight to win on council pay

By a local government worker

Council workers receive the lowest pay in the public sector, and have faced an 18% decline in pay over the last eight years, with below inflation pay rises and three years with no increase at all.

Workers have faced some of the worst cuts in services, with some councils having seen 30% cuts since 2010, while the cost of services are increasing due to increase in cost of elderly care and services to support the vulnerable being in greater demand.

Unions like Unison and GMB should be taking a stand against another year of pay cuts planned by local government employers.

The Local Government Association, the employers' body, has so far failed to even make an offer in response to the unions' joint



claim for a flat rate increase of at least £1.20 per hour. So, at last, unions have announced a dispute, and this has brought the LGA back to the negotiating table, agreeing to meet unions on 20 March (instead of 1 May as planned).

But, as with last year, this feels like too little, too late.

Last year, union members reluctantly accepted the miserable 1% offer, but this was only paid in September (five months later than the 1 April date for our annual pay award). The North West, London,

and Scotland regions of Unison voted to oppose the deal and to strike, but the majority of union members voted to accept.

By allowing the employers, year after year, to make an offer at the eleventh hour, or, as with last year, to propose action *after* the pay rise was actually due, risks members accepting whatever is offered because they have no choice.

A low-paid worker on not much more than minimum wage needs the pay rise on 1 April, and even if the employer offers a pit-

tance, to many that money in your hand now is the difference between buying your children shoes this term or next.

Unions need to realise that action needs to be taken months before the pay offer date, not talking up action in the final month.

So how do we get out of this impasse?

Firstly, the unions should start a serious campaign now for targeted industrial action with proper strike pay from day one. If the employers are to be pushed into making an offer better than 1%, they need to know the plan is more creative than one day of action, and that action could actually hit the running of council services like street cleaning, IT services, or parking inspection. A week-long action by parking inspectors where they refused to issue fines would be hugely popular with the public and would hit the council's finances.

Secondly union members and the employers need to know that the unions mean business. Unions, at branch and national levels, need war chests to finance sustained action. Having strike funds lets workers know the union will support them in taking action, and shows the employers the unions are in the fight to win. The Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB) strike at the University of London, which used strike pay to finance 48-hour strikes, shows how strike funds can be effective on a local level.

Finally, whatever happens this year, next year's claim and strategy need to be planned to deliver action well before the pay rise is due.

A dispute needs to be in place in the Autumn, and action planned in the Winter, using creative targeted action as well as all-out action, and with a strike fund from the start.

Tories seek to ruin civil service union

By a PCS activist

Tory Minister Francis Maude, who has responsibility for the civil service, has asked all civil service departments to consider ending "check off", the system by which union members pay their dues directly from their salary.

Having asked departments once, and seemingly not got the answers he wanted, he is pressing again. It is a move which is designed to financially harm PCS, by far the largest of the civil service unions, the only one which has

most of its members on the check off system, and the only one which shows any genuine opposition to the government's policies of slash and burn.

Right-wing Tories simply want to smash up PCS's cash flow by ending the check off within a short space of time so that PCS struggles to transfer its members to payment by direct debit. It is a clear anti-union move, of a piece with the Tories' efforts since the late 1970s to break trade unionism in Britain, busting whole industries if need be.

The consequence of this class-war policy is the



chronic inequality in Britain today, rising workplace stress illnesses, and the huge managerial authority in the workplace (increasingly mirrored by an employment tribunal system

that is being made harder and harder to access and navigate).

Ending check off for the civil service may not have the "drama" of deliberately engineering disputes to cow or break unions, as Thatcher did, but the intended result is the same. The Tories also have their eyes on public-sector union Unison. If a Tory government ends check off in the civil service, then Tory-run local authorities could do the same for Unison.

In March 2013, the Department for Local Government and Communities put out a shabby piece of work under the Orwellian title of "Taxpayer funding of trade unions: Delivering sensible savings in local government", which recom-

mended that: "Councils should charge for collecting union subscriptions, or end the practice completely."

With this advance notice the PCS leadership should have spotted the attack and prepared for it well before now. Unison should be preparing for future attacks.

Ahead of any departmental decisions to end check off PCS is now, belatedly, seeking to move its members to direct debit payment. It has written to every Labour and Liberal MP asking them to oppose the ending of check off by any Department.

PCS is right to demand that Liberal MPs oppose the ending of check off, but there needs to be a clear and public demand on Clegg that the Liberals in Cabinet refuse to go along with attempts to financially ruin trade unions and intimidate them from campaigning for members and services by threatening their membership income.

PCS now needs to focus membership campaigning around this issue and the TUC needs to ensure that not a single union is allowed to be ruined by the Tories.

SOAS cleaners to strike again



By Ira Berkovic

Cleaning workers at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) in central London will strike again on 21 March.

The workers, who are members of Unison, struck on 4-5 March. They are employed by private cleaning contractor ISS, and are demanding the same holiday entitlement,

contractual sick pay, and pension scheme as directly-employed staff.

Workers are not satisfied with the progress made since the 4-5 March strike, so will walk out again for 24 hours on 21 March.

Pickets will be mounted from 4am at the school's central buildings in Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square.

More: bit.ly/j4c-soas

NHS pay fight

By a health worker

The government have continued their attacks on the NHS by announcing a zero cost-of-living pay rise for the majority of health workers and a meagre 1% only for those on the top of their pay band.

Even this 1% only applies to basic pay, not unsocial hours or overtime payments. Health workers have endured many years of zero or less than inflation pay rises, leaving all ordinary health workers struggling and poverty pay a reality for many.

The argument that reducing pay means more money for services won't be taken seriously. This comes from a government who have cut and undermined the NHS, increasing workload and reducing patient care, in a drive to privatise health care for the benefit of the rich.

Their other argument that those not receiving cost of living pay are getting incremental pay rises so will get an uplift is equally insulting. Increments are annual increases, linked to performance, which build up to the full pay for the job at the top of the band. The government are stating the pay offer next year will mirror this year's unless the incremental pay system is renegotiated. The government is fully aware of how potentially divisive this might be amongst health workers.

Unite have already announced they will ballot. Unison have issued a weak statement, saying this shows the government needs to go and government should conform to the PRB recommendation. The issue will no doubt be at the fore at Unison's forthcoming Health conference (14-16 April).

Activists must submit and support emergency motions calling for a programme of action that aims to win, rather than allowing the leadership to grandstand with tokenistic action.



Solidarity

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30p/80p

Stop starving the NHS!

By James O'Brien

The new pay settlement in the health service has denied 615,000 NHS staff a 1% pay rise this year. They will receive their usual annual increments in 2014-15 but nothing else.

A further 550,000 staff will get a 1% rise for each of the next two years but as monthly additional payments alongside their salary.

This game of Tory divide and rule is estimated to save just £200 million from the NHS budget this year. Its real intention is to further attack the pay and conditions of NHS workers.

Because despite what the Coalition claims, there is plenty of money going around. Bankers' bonuses worldwide are 29% higher than a year, with even larger increases in the City of London. The divide between rich and poor is re-

flected in the NHS itself.

A firm with a close advisor to the Tories has made £2.6 million from the health service in 10 months by filling vacancies in the new Clinical Commissioning Groups set up under the Health and Social Care Act. Tory MP Nadhim Zahawi has been a non-executive director of the recruitment firm SThree since 2008, and earns £2,917 a month for seven hours work. This is the man who last December said child benefit and tax credits should be taken away from families after they have two children.

The NHS is slowing being starved to death by combined process of cuts, reforms and privatisations.

More than a third of hospital trusts are predicting deficits at the end of this financial year. The net total forecast deficit of the 141 trusts is £373.1 million — a rapid deterioration from the £700 million net surplus last year.



Lobby of Parliament against Clause 119

Much of it is as a result of the end of "transitional support" from strategic health authorities, which were abolished under the new legislation. Many of these trusts would have been in a similar financial situation in 2012-13 without the bail-out funding they received to stabilise them; now that safety net has been removed.

Under the new system, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) have been placed in charge of around £70 billion, representing more than two-thirds of the NHS budget. These GP-led bodies have been pushed to spend precious resources on private companies to advise them on buying care, drug purchasing and negotiating hospi-

tal contracts.

NHS England has just advertised for companies to compete for £5 billion of such work, placing a handful of private companies at the centre of the health system. Capita, G4S, Serco and the rest will be advising on the commissioning of services — of which they themselves are major providers.

All Trusts are now obliged to get "best value" contracts for all their services. Millions are being wasted on this tendering process.

All this at a time when NHS is being forced to making £20 billion efficiency savings.

And the meantime, clause 119 of the Care Bill (which has just past its

final Parliamentary stage), will give the government sweeping powers to close and part-close hospitals without full local consultation. In London a third of Accident and Emergency departments are under threat.

We are now in the run-up to a general election and many Tory and Lib-Dem MPs in marginal constituencies will be under pressure over local hospitals and services. Labour's Andy Burnham has promised to repeal the Health and Social Care Act. But will Labour reverse the cuts?

There is both an opportunity and a responsibility here to build a renewed community and labour movement campaigns; campaigns which can mobilise to defend hospitals before the government has a chance to close them down. Without such a campaign we cannot save the NHS.

Teachers will strike on 26 March

By Charlotte Zeleus

A special meeting of the National Executive of the National Union of Teachers has confirmed a national strike will take place on 26 March.

Unfortunately, the other main teaching union, the NASUWT, has decided not to strike on the pretext that it wants to give talks with the Department for Education a chance. The small Welsh-speaking union UCAC also pulled out of the action with the same excuse.

But the Department for Education have made it very clear that these will not deal with the issues at the heart of the teachers' dispute. They will only discuss the implementation of policies, and "policies which have already been determined". The raising of



the retirement age to 69, and the end of final salary pensions and automatic annual pay progression, are not up for discussion.

Unsurprisingly NUT Executive concluded was that there had been minimal progress in talks and certainly nothing to justify the suspension of the strike.

The union has conducted two surveys in the last two weeks to measure support for the strike; the survey of 10,000 members showed very strong support for the strike.

The recommendation from national officers was that the strike proceed and no-one argued any differ-

ently.

The idea that unions have to choose between action and talking is a nonsense. The NUT have been to all the talks and will continue to attend while they take strike action on 26 March. The refusal of other teacher unions to co-ordinate with the biggest organisation is the biggest help Gove could hope for

But what happens after 26 March? A well-supported strike may force the NASUWT to reconsider their position? Whether this dispute involves both unions or just the NUT, however, it cannot win or produce really significant concessions on the basis of very occasional one day strikes.

Since 2012 the Local Associations National Action Campaign has argued for an escalating programme

of action designed to win the dispute or force significant concessions. Public campaigning, street stalls, rallies and meetings needs to be backed up with a serious industrial strategy. This continues to be the only way to revive the dispute and give real hope to the tens of thousands of teachers who will strike on 26 March.

The attacks on teachers by government have increased since the 2011 pensions proposals. There have been changes to national pay arrangements and the huge expansion of academies. The NUT and the other teacher unions need to be clear what they are demanding.

Some useful work has been done to develop demands which would stretch the talks on implementation.

We need to address some of the core issues such as national pay, pension age and excessive workload. To restore national pay rates, reduce the unsustainable workload, and ensure that these things apply to all state-funded schools, it will be necessary to draw up a clear set of demands.

A fight for a national contract, campaigned for with teachers and the public, could become a tool for breathing new energy and clarity into a long-running dispute.

The NUT Executive will meet again on 3 April to start discussion on the next steps in the campaign; it will put a priority motion to the union's conference at Easter.

We need to make sure solid strategy is put on the agenda at Easter.